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## Corrections

In the Spring issue on page 4 the construction of the 31st & Nicollet roundhouse should be 1886, not 1884.

On page 7 it said the Dan Patch was cut back to 69th Street in 1922. That should be 60th Street.

## Stories from the Ed Nelson notes

**-Aaron Isaacs**

The late Ed Nelson was a major contributor to our understanding of the history of Twin City Rapid Transit. A motorman and conductor from 1947 to 1954, it is not overstatement to say he was obsessed with local streetcar operations. He kept incredibly detailed notes on every aspect of the operation that he observed, plus quite a bit that he heard second hand. These he typed up in 1955, along with additional commentary written at that time.

Ed was passionately, emotionally invested in the streetcars and how well, or poorly, the operation went. Very customer-oriented, his notes are constantly critical of co-workers and supervisors who mistreated passengers, passed them up, unnecessarily shortlined cars, failed to provide fill-ins when they could be run, wrote schedules that couldn't be kept and didn't keep the heater fires burning on cold winter nights. He didn't respect employees for whom it was just a job. When not working, he wandered the system, writing down everything he saw, along with opinions about whether or not it had been done well.

He loved the two-man gate cars and much preferred to be a conductor on a gate car than a motorman operating alone. As the gate cars were being phased out, he worked on them whenever possible, and tracked the remaining ones as they were moved between carhouses, in and out of the shop and finally to scrapping. He had a similar soft spot for the small number of lightweight cars which, although the newest in the fleet, were disliked by many employees and sidelined whenever possible. He pretty much hated PCC cars and requested standard cars even after PCCs were assigned to most of the base service.

Ed dove into the history of the system. Together with Russ Olson, he did the research that in 1953 produced *Interurbans*



14, the first comprehensive history of Twin Cities streetcars. Using old records that had never been discarded, Ed compiled a timeline of car assignments dating back to 1906, a truly obsessive undertaking that typified his attention to detail.

The conversion of the system to bus from 1950 to 1954

Front cover: A Minnesota Railfans Association fan trip takes a break on the siding inside the Minnehaha Falls loop. Ed Nelson, standing on the fender, was the motorman that day. Some longtime MSM members are present, including Ray Benson in the white suit, Russ Olson (hands hooked in pockets); Gene Hickey (hands behind his back) who designed the Linden Hills depot; and Bob Schumacher (back to camera behind the girl).

Inside front cover: Ed Nelson, the subject of this issue, took his camera with him when he operated. This is Central Avenue at 23rd Avenue NE, viewed through the controls of his northbound PCC car. See more of Ed's photos starting on page 17.



Note the differences between a gate car and a 1-man, 2-man button car, seen at the St. Paul campus loop. The gate car had rear manual wire gates and a manual front exit door and required a conductor. The button car had air-operated doors.

was hard on Ed, because the old standards of service and maintenance were largely abandoned. The cars became unreliable and overcrowding continued because service was cut faster than the ridership dropped. Carhouse after carhouse closed until only East Side Station was left. Ed transferred there to keep running until the bitter end in June 1954.

Because they are crammed with detail that is frequently mundane, full of insider abbreviations and jargon, and written as phrases and incomplete sentences (these were notes, after all), Ed's notes can be hard for a general audience to understand. For that reason I've edited them into complete sentences, changed the wording in places and parenthetically clarified some of the jargon.

If you read through all the notes, it becomes clear that TCRT wasn't always the smooth-running operation we think of today. There were periodic shortages of either streetcars or crew, or not enough streetcars at one carhouse, but a surplus at others. Buses filled in for streetcars and vice versa.

Bad weather, especially snow and ice, tied up the city and the streetcars along with it. Switches iced shut, cars derailed when ice filled flangeways and parked automobiles fouled the tracks everywhere. The inability of streetcars to detour around obstacles meant that every flooded intersection, derailment or other obstacle shut down the line in question.

All these problems were compounded as the new post-1949 management cut maintenance and most of the streetcars, already 30-40+ years old, began to break down and derail ever more frequently. Ed recorded it all and it's a depressing read.

Ed's notes run for 138 single-spaced typed pages, plus numerous tables on car assignments. Much of it is only for

the hard-core streetcar fan, but scattered through are wonderful anecdotes that capture the culture and feel of the place, as seen from the inside. It's an invaluable historical record. My thanks to Russ Olson for preserving it. Speaking of jargon, here are some of the more common terms that he uses.

**Gate car:** The TCRT streetcars were originally built with rear wire gates and were designed to be run by a motorman and a conductor, a 2-man car. Narrow front exit doors were added in the 1920s. By the late 1940's, a relatively small number of these cars remained, concentrated on the heaviest lines and the Inter-Campus.

**1-man, 2-man car; button car:** The rest of the fleet looked like #1300, with air operated doors. They could be operated with or without a conductor. Button car refers to the door buttons in front of the motorman.

**Starter, inspector:** Street supervisors, mostly assigned to fixed posts, but later given autos to drive.

**Station:** TCRT's term for the carhouse. Ed worked at North Side, Lake Street and East Side.

**Foreman:** The shift supervisor at the station. There was a day and a night foreman.

**Clerk:** The office person at the station who assigned the work and the streetcars. They were drawn from the motorman/conductor ranks and Ed held the job on occasion.

**Pullout:** To enter service, specifically to pull a car out of the station yard.

**Pullin:** To return the car to the station.

**Relief:** To replace another crew on the street, while the streetcar itself remained in service.

**Shortline:** To end the trip prematurely by turning around short of the end of the line, usually to get a late car back on schedule.



The notes are presented in chronological order. Here we go.

There was a "healer" at the Fremont Tabernacle March 4-14, 1947, later extended a week. The church put big ads in the paper, including "Take Chicago-Fremont Car to 25th Ave. No." They rode up there about 730 PM, stayed 'til midnight. One day a conductor loudly called "21st", they thought he said "25th", and the whole load of Holy Rollers rolled out at 21st. The motorman picked them up again and took them to 25th. Another night, I was conning (*working as conductor*) a gate car, we picked up 50 of them at 14th-Chicago, and they sang hymns all the way to 25th and Emerson. We hauled most of the cripples in town up there; as I didn't watch the night run cars, I don't know how many were crippled when they went home.

They presented problems when they broke up for southbound cars due for owl relief. One night Farrell handed out 100 transfers at 25th, had to transfer all of them at Broadway-Emerson at 11:48 to owl pulling out from North Side Station. Another night one car picked up 121 there, next car filled up also. To solve the problem, night run cars ran to downtown instead of pulling in from Broadway-Emerson.

Bus & Trolley News (*the union newsletter*) had an interesting item. "Do you remember when virtually the whole extra board of Bus Garage #1 was arrested in a gambling den, and the Supt. had to get out of bed and bail them out so the runs could go out the next morning."

May 1, 1947

Kids wild at 42nd-Thomas Saturday night. Pulled trolley (*pole off the wire*) of 10:26 PM car, cut (*trolley pole*) rope of

my car at 10:36. I had to climb to the roof. Pulled Arnie Carlson's trolley at 10:46; threw rock at car 1197 Al Gotreau's car at 10:56, broke deck roof window. When Al set out, at 41st-Thomas he found a new garbage can cover dangling from a clothesline thrown over the wires. He took the stuff home, as he needed a new garbage can cover and could use the line for a boat anchor.

Fred Spath, motorman 1635, to get passengers to go to the right doors, made himself a special "Exit Only" sign, then a fancy "Out Only" sign, then one that said "WAY OUT". But he had to quit using that one, because the people thought "WAY OUT" meant the car was headed way out to 54th Street.

*Intentionally running "hot" (ahead of schedule) was a common problem for over 100 years until Metro Transit installed bus GPS about 15 years ago. By running early, a motorman could reduce the number of passengers he had to carry, which meant less work. Of course, the car behind him got a bigger load and probably fell behind schedule, which led to a hole on the service, followed by two-three streetcars running back to back. In transit jargon, the car ahead of you was your "leader" and the car behind you was your "follower". Here's an incident that left Ed "mad enough to quit", although he didn't.*

May 23, 1947

*Ed was working the 28th Avenue S.-Robbinsdale line during the PM rush hour, when cars ran every 5 minutes. "As I sat in the wye at 50th Street and 28th Avenue S., my leader (from 56th Street) went by in a cloud of dust, 4 minutes hot, so I left just as hot, was 7 minutes hot at Lake Street, but never saw my leader. Inspector Costello asked me my time. I asked where the*

*last one was, he said it waited at Lake for its time. I said it couldn't have, since it wasn't due for two minutes yet. But he made me wait there, holding up a North Bryant car several minutes. I turned onto Franklin right on the dot, when lo and behold, who comes around the corner behind me, but the next Robbinsdale, at the time he is due at Lake. I was very, very mad, and got to 36th and France in Robbinsdale 17 minutes late.*

A fast driving motorman was Wiebe #1537, regular on the Robbinsdale baby owl (*an owl car that only ran half of the overnight hours*). One night an auto followed him downhill on Broadway on his 230 AM pullin trip and clocked him at 55 mph. A different night, another motorist who could hardly keep up with Wiebe finally caught him at a car stop and asked sarcastically if he was on time, and Wiebe yanked the motorist out of his auto and beat him up (so I heard).

November 12, 1947

Motorman Cable #1209 ran very rough (or rather very smooth if he wished to be, but got frequent mean streaks). I had conned for Cable before when he ran smoothly, but very hot, also when he ran slow and got a long string of cars behind him, and when he used a special method of starting that threw all boarding passengers against the rear windows. One conductor had to make an accident report when a passenger was thrown and injured his face. Another conductor was thrown onto the back platform one day by cable's quick start, tore his pants on one of the rear heaters and had to be relieved.

The passengers soon got on to his driving. It was amusing to watch his car and another reaching Broadway; Cable in front poking along with half

his seats empty, the other car right behind him with a big standing load.

December 6, 1947

I got one of the highest compliments of my life when a distinguished looking older gentleman said, "I like the way you handle this car."

Christmas shopping was on full blast. Joe Flukey #1247 was conning and we got \$68.30 on the run, representing over 700 fares, plus transfers. There was a 3-minute Saturday service, plus extras.

December 9, 1947

Took biggest load ever out to 54th and Chicago on a below-zero day. The starters must have been shortlining all the long-lines again (*at 48th Street*). The mob waiting for us at 48th Street gave us a load of 125 for the next six blocks to 54th. I had to make three requests for the passengers to move forward (*there was a conductor, so passengers boarded through the rear gates*), which they complied with every time, 'til they almost bulged into the front vestibule; and when we closed the rear gates to go, we had four people standing on the bottom step.

December 24, 1947

I was conductor on car 1350 with motorman Swede Johnson, working from 4:03 to 5:53 PM. Most people had gone home for an earlier than usual rush hour. Returning north at 38th and Chicago, Swede said, "Let's run on time and screw up the line." We ran on time and were followed by a long string of cars, running hot with no work to do.

February 4, 1948

Drove chartered Penn Avenue special, leaving 38th-Penn at 12:09 PM; at 36th-Penn loaded 93 small kids from Penn School (78 were expected); at



This is an old photo from 1916 before Penn Avenue was paved, but there is Penn School at 36th Avenue.

Lowry loaded 37 more from Cleveland School. Via Fremont line (via 7th Street) to downtown, 2nd Avenue S. through downtown, over the Central Avenue bridge, then via the Oak line on 4th Street SE to 15th Avenue in Dinkytown where they unloaded for a play at the University of Minnesota. I wyped at Oak and Beacon and returned to East Side Station at 1 PM, along with other charters from East Side, North Side and Lake Street Stations. We were paid all the way through, pulling out at 2:37 to pick up the kids and retrace the route back to north Minneapolis.

Two-day storm started February 27. Heavy rain in the AM, then temperatures dropped. Ice started forming on the wires. By noon cars were breaking trolley poles left and right.

March 3, 1948

I'd always wanted to con once for old-timer Adolph Tuma #1327 (*hired 1917, retired July 3, 1948*). Found he drove the way he walked (he didn't walk, he waddled). 6 minutes late in loop, 14 minutes late at 38th-Penn. Tuma, like old Chris Eidem, though slow, was very good hearted, and always waited for everyone. They

helped form the backbone of the Chicago Avenue service in the war and after, by working morning one-piece runs and then long PM pullouts afterwards, as if driving up and down Chicago Avenue was all there was to do in life. When he reached 70 and had to retire, Tuma cried because they wouldn't let him work on his birthday.

Eidem was an old bachelor, rooming on Washington Avenue not far from the station. He'd bring a donut in a bag as lunch on his 8-hour run, then take a nap in a streetcar 'til it was time for the extra afternoon pullout. His conductor, Allers #3420, said Eidem paid for the

house for his brother who had nine kids and no money. When he retired, Eidem spent the days standing on the corner at Marquette and Washington.

One night on the last car to Camden (12:30 AM) Nyberg #1367 saw Eidem there, lying passed out on the sidewalk, helped him on the car and carried him home.

March 11, 1948

Winter's record cold. 27 below, coldest since 31 below in 1943. My car 1580 had no frost shields, but motorman's window shade placed behind the controller made the front platform electric heater throw heat onto the window and clear it. Our coal heater fire burned but didn't heat car. My con Kirby #1179 kicked hell out of pipes beneath the car to clear them out but they were plugged up.

March 13, 1938

Going up Emerson on "Haley's Comet" (motorman Fred Haley #1165), between 18th Avenue and Broadway a car was parked close to the tracks with a woman in it. Haley wound up car 1499, click-ping-crash! Haley kept right on going and I just had to shut my eyes.

Motorman Gust Johnson #1477 gently eased the gates shut behind a very slow boarder, who then pushed his behind against the gates and broke the gate rod. Conductor Ernie Lundberg had to work the gates by hand.

March 17, 1948

Best motorman in the station was Lloyd Johnson #1459. I conned for him March 5 in the snowstorm. He had the situation under control when everyone else was late and going nuts. Most motormen hated to wait for people, got mad at a conductor who held



things up. Johnson impressed me one night when ready to leave 54th Street and I rang the buzzer to wait for someone coming. A crippled woman on crutches got on, and he didn't start the car until she had sat down. I watched Johnson's driving a lot. He sometimes ran a trifle early but always waited for connections and people running. It's odd how happy people get when they'd run for a car and "just catch it". They'd get on feeling very good, which is a contagious feeling, and it was pleasure to con for such a driver. In contrast, lots of motormen loved to slam the doors in people's faces, and it was embarrassing to be the conductor looking out at them.

March 24, 1948

I first saw television (second day of KSTP) while conning at Broadway and Emerson at 8:36 PM. A little knot of people was clustered around sets in the window of Ken Johnston's appliance store.

Bought an old (coin) changer from Jerry Nordlund for \$1, had Fish Olson cut the barrels short for \$1. There was no penny barrel. Now I had a tiny changer for the last 1-man trip on a night run. I could carry the changer in my back pocket. Later used it on owl runs at East Side Station.

July 9, 1948

*This was the first day of the schedule change, and Ed switched from an owl (overnight) run to a morning run. I did not want to sleep at the station the night of the changeover so stayed up all night, had the foreman let me con instead of drive. Once I dozed off at 35th-Chicago, was woke up by passengers. After run, went home and slept 18 hours.*



August 28, 1948

I worked the day 8-4 cashier shift at the station, was going home when Callaway asked if I wanted to make "a trip to the State Fair Grounds". There was a twinkle in his eye, as if he knew what "a trip" meant. So I pulled out car 1678 and worked till 1140 PM, and made over 25 hours of pay that day.

September 9, 1948

I carried "Lake Minnetonka" sign on the pole side (left side) clerestory of car 1397, having waited months to get a car I could do so in (the Lake Minnetonka signs had been removed from most cars). Only heard from one motorman who noticed it.

Oct. 15-16, 1948

Football specials: Washburn played at North, Vocational at Henry. Four specials from North Side, four from Nicollet. For Saturday game at the U, there were 11 pullouts from North Side.

November 25, 1948

Riding a Fremont car, I was discussing with motorman Harold Hiatt #1641 what to do with a penny stuck in the dime barrel of his changer, when an auto with windows all frosted drove right into our front doors.

*Coal, sand and ash boxes were placed at the ends of the lines, but apparently that changed from year to year. Ed did an inventory of the lines served by North Side Station. He found all three boxes at 19th & Upton (west end of the Broadway crosstown), and at 42nd & Thomas, 44th & Oliver and 54th & Chicago, the three*

*end points of the Chicago-Penn-Fremont line. However, he noted, there were none at 48th & Chicago, causing those cars to extend to 54th & Chicago so they wouldn't run out of coal.*

*At the end of 1948, Ed was not feeling good about the company. Here's what he said. The awful cycle of higher fares for less service had begun. many trainmen worked as if they just had to put so many miles on their cars, without regard to how the public was treated; I had a regular conductor in the summer who had an argument with a passenger nearly every trip. There were irregularities and favoritism in marking up (assigning) the work. (Company) Spies and spotters got paid to make only bad reports. Their reports were handled as if the company assumed in advance that we were dishonest. I think we in turn were supposed to assume that every passenger would cheat if he could. So many little things were ignored that made it easier to serve the public pleasantly.*

Old-time Nicollet conductors got a raw deal when that line went one-man July 30, 1949. Five of them went to East Side, five went to North Side, and went to the bottom of the extra board. I was disgusted that these men with 30 to 40 years service should be kicked way down to the bottom, under me with my three years service.

I worked summer day runs and summer night runs in 1949, but always went back on the extra board for several reasons: in the fall, to get possible Fair Grounds work, special cars, etc.; to be conning about half the time while rails were slippery from leaves; and for variety.

This was printed on the back of a

Como-Harriet transfer; "Passenger: Which end of the car do I get off? Conductor: Either one, it stops at both ends."

January 3, 1950

Worst sleet storm. As I was going up Penn, the temperature hit the point where rain-sleet mixture started to ice up the wires. Going south the lights would go off every so often for a few seconds, then the trolley wheel would melt the ice and make contact with the wire again. When I got to 48th-Chicago there were about eight cars stuck there from ice on the wires. I finally left 48th an hour late. I had to keep backing up over wires I had just cleared and then take a fast running start to see how far I could get.

January 5, 1950

We had very dead car 1396 to take to Snelling Shops. It was coupled up and chained to 1195, which I drove dragging 1396. Wondered if (notoriously rickety) Washington Avenue bridge would collapse beneath two cars so close together. Swanson #1163 rode in the second car. Theoretically, if the cars came apart, he would apply the hand brake (Hand brakes DID occasionally work at North Side, never did at East Side).

January 24, 1950

I pulled out 1594 for night run, temperature 1 below. Car had stood in the yard with an open window. Fire smoldered, would not burn or give heat. Had no backrest for my seat. Controller fingers were sticky. Car cut out when put in the corner (the highest notch on the controller). Found out soon that only half the lights worked. Otherwise, it was a good car.

We often ran Bryant line pullouts for Lake Street Station in February and

March, due to a car shortage at Lake Street. It was cheaper for us to run it than to have Lake send a man to borrow a car and have to return it later.

Blind persons got free rides starting March 15. At first a white cane was enough to get free rides. Later they were issued ID cards. Once Nyberg refused a ride to a "blind" man who didn't have a card, and the "blind" man got very abusive and took out paper and wrote down the car number so he could report Nyberg.

March 5, 1950  
4 North Side cars to the circus.

April 12, 1950  
I had an all-gate car day, by request. I ran 1401 from 5:04-10:08 AM on Broadway. The heater fires were out, it was 16 above, and my conductor Jake Hochstedler cussed the gate car all morning (He wore long underwear all summer and kept his sheepskin on about 9 months of the year). In the PM

I got 1343 from 2:31 to 5:39 and conductor William Sorenson #1397 was very mad and brought up his bad heart condition (which is why he was conning instead of driving bus) and didn't like having to open and close the rear bulkhead doors.

May 3, 1950  
I rode supply car #97 from North Side to the Snelling Shops storehouse, sitting on a box in front of the resistors. The driver had been running the supply car since 1931.

May 24, 1950  
35 cars to Minnehaha Park for the School Patrol Picnic.  
Worked Monday and Thursday evening store extras (*traditionally, the downtown stores were only open evenings on Monday and Thursday*).

November 1, 1950  
I was bringing car 1469 from Snelling Shops to North Side. As I recall there were one or two other shop

cars ahead of me. This must have struck up hope in a group of 3 teachers and 14 school kids standing in very cold wind at Marquette-Washington. Seeing my car, the last, also Not In Service, the cop there came out and asked if I would take the group up to Franklin Creamery, on Washington a couple blocks before North Side. I knew we were half-way between the Camden cars that ran every 24 minutes, so I said yes, and got 17 Nicollet line transfers. This was strictly against the rules. This company attitude I could not understand. I wouldn't want people on a crippled car headed to the shop, but a car that was fixed could help out waiting passengers a great deal.

Most of the last "bobby signals", center-of-intersection stop-and-go signs, disappeared in Feb. and March 1951. On November 1, 1950 I was conning when our car brushed and knocked over the sign at 38th-Chicago. It lay flat on the street but kept right on working. Someone soon set it up straight again. My motorman explained the signs had rubber bases which usually snapped them upright when they were hit. Only a real hard head-on blow knocked them off and broke the base and cables. Once at Broadway-Penn he hit one with a snow plow. With wider plows, on some curves, the men would go out and hold the sign off to the side while the plow took the curve.

The Franklin Junior High band ordered a special car to go to Ramsey Junior High and give an auditorium program, but there was a storm on March 31, so it was rescheduled for April 1. Meanwhile the special trip sheet was mislaid and forgotten at North Side. The car was to load at 16th-Washington at 9:00. About 9:05

the band leader called to ask where the car was. As I happened to be in the office arguing about my pay check with the foreman, he found the trip sheet, gave it to me and rushed out with me to fix up a car. We got 1469 all ready, then saw it had no fender. We tried fenders from a gate car and 1583, but they wouldn't fit, so we fixed up 1583. I pulled out at 9:15, but the band did get to Ramsey on time.

Harry Dean made the markup (*streetcar crew assignments*) twice a week and did it fast, as he did most things. His speed awed me at first, til later I discovered such things as marking up Nyberg #1367 on two days when he was on vacation, and he marked me up for 9:00 AM station call, although my morning piece ended at Broadway-Emerson at 9:28.



Supply car 97, probably with the long-time driver mentioned by Ed.



A bobby signal. This one is at Como and Snelling.



November 8, 1950

Fires were built in all the car heaters Wed. and Thurs. (some years a few car got fires earlier than others and were kept on the owl runs). One woman in North Side shops had started a month earlier on the big job of washing and putting on all the storm windows, starting with the pole sides of the cars. In the spring, storm windows would come off the gate (*right*) sides first, and later off the pole (*left*) sides, to be replaced by screens.

November 15, 1950

All my life I wanted to drive a streetcar, but the ambition which seemed the pinnacle of everything was to be a starter at Broadway and Emerson. And did I ever envy whoever got put on that corner!

I was often disgusted to have to put people out at 48th and Chicago on cold and windy nights, when it was 15 minutes until the next car to 54th Street. One night I took 2 riders to 54th as it was very stormy, got into the station on time anyhow, told about it in the office, night foreman said I shouldn't have done that, making unscheduled mileage was as bad as skipping mileage without permission.

I had almost perfect success building fires in the underfloor heater on night runs this winter. Gave coal a chance to burn before throwing more on, coal would throw heat about two hours after it went in the stove. Throwing a shovel of snow on the fire was very good. In a minute the steam would clear up anything that plugged up the heat pipes. Salt was also very good.

November 17, 1950

Of passenger habits: On Chicago Avenue people were excellent at filling



up the car by going right to the opposite end that they had got on at. I have a mental picture of being a gate car conductor, stop by stop filling the seats along Chicago Avenue 'til we got the first man who would have to stand; automatically he went to the front, grabbed the farthest forward strap with one hand and got his newspaper out to read with the other. Penn and Fremont north end people were much different and you couldn't pack the

cars so well: first standing would hang onto the first double seat he came to, and like as not no one else would walk past him. Loading big loads downtown going north, I'd holler and beg and plead for them to move up and usually it didn't do any good.

November 25, 1950

Found snow scrapers (*used to clear the car steps*) taken off cars by Mr. Green during first good snow.

At Fort Snelling I saw snow plow #79 back up there as if to wye out (*turn around on the wye*); then it kept backing all the way down the Fort Snelling dummy (*shuttle*) line, which it plowed going forward on its return.

"Candy lady" rode with me several times on the night run, 8th and Nicollet to 16th-Chicago. She always gave the motorman a candy bar. A

man who got on at 2nd Avenue S. and 6th Street in the evening always laid a new pencil down by the air valve. I got quite a collection, all lettered "First Federal Savings-Loan Assn." One man handed me a cigar with his transfer.

Owl Johnson #1305 gave me what he called the "inside scoop" on the Lake Street Station motorman who committed suicide in February. He was an old-timer who worked the East 25th Street owl for many years. He got bumped (*a motorman with more seniority took his run*) last fall, so he picked the other East 25th owl. The man who bumped him then had his only son killed in Korea, quit the job and took his wife to California. The old-timer then asked if he could have that owl back. He was refused and got so mad he had a heart attack, and was off sick from then until his suicide. He wanted that owl run because it had more pay time.

March 3, 1951

Frost shield night: As usual by this time of year, most of the frost shields on the car windows had done their winter's duty and were cracked or lost or steamed and clouded up. But cold weather continued, with frozen windows, and I had seen night run and owl men driving with just the tiniest peep holes to see through. I went to work at 4:45PM on car 1200. It had no front shields, but the windows were clear at the time. I was 5:10PM at 44th-Oliver, but was blocked by parked autos before getting to Broadway-Emerson. Left 54th-Chicago 17 minutes late. On the next trip north the windows froze up. Very hard to see out. After more delays by parked cars by 9:49PM I was 38 minutes late at 44th-Oliver. I called up the station and asked for a car change at Broadway-



Bloomington-Columbia Heights cars encounter an obstruction on Chicago Avenue at 5th Street. That's a frost shield on the windshield. At right beyond the TCRT emergency truck is the Rock Island Railroad "fruit house", now the site of the US Bank Stadium. Minneapolis Star-Tribune photo, Minnesota Historical Society collection.

Washington, one with good shields. I got car 1576 with two terrible spots in the front shield so I had to crouch down to see out at all. Stalled turning

from Washington to 2nd Avenue S. by parked cars. Finally got the cops to move them out of the way.

Called the station from downtown

to complain about the bad frost shields. Returned to the station; shopman came over with a knife and ripped off my clouded frost shields. I





Above: A motorman attempts to move the obstacle.

Right: Too often snow storms resulted in this--late and overloaded cars, delayed and frustrated passengers.

asked "What if it freezes over?" And he said "What's a matter with your eyes?" I pulled back into the station after one more trip (missed going to south Minneapolis) and went into the yard to look for a car with good frost shields. I looked at the front car on every track, but the only two good ones were already assigned. So I told night clerk Harry Dean. He had them pull out car 1586 for me. It had good shields but no fire in the heater so I wouldn't take it. By then it was time to pull in, so I went home and lay awake thinking of all the safety talks I had heard.

Monday I got the works from Syrdal the foreman. He was mainly shocked that he was such a bad judge of my character. I should be able to go a trip

without a fire. As for frost shields, they didn't used to have them, the old timers used to go out with a bag of salt and a razor blade. Supervisor Gilyard said of me "If he's not satisfied with the equipment he'd better start looking for another job." I finally made up my mind really to quit. The winter had been very bad, snow and parked autos the worst culprits, and an hour between cars was very common on Penn and Fremont.

March 5, 1951

Stalled for the zillionth time by a parked auto, when it was suggested a couple of us could shove it out of the way, my motorman Coder #1675 said "I didn't hire out to be a tow truck." But we did move the car over and proceed-

ed on our merry way. Afterwards I learned that motorman 1367 pushed a car and got his foot run over. The company doctor said it was his own fault, as he was supposed to stay in the streetcar and not be out pushing cars.

March 7, 1951

Frozen switches and the Penn owl: From 2 to 5 am the Penn owl car ran Broadway to Washington to 2nd Ave. S. to 5th Street (a departure from the normal daytime route to downtown via 7th Street). This morning Woidela #1249 found the switch from Washington to 2nd Avenue S. frozen solid. Not able to make the turn, he backed up a block to Marquette, took Marquette to 6th Street (there was no switch to turn onto 5th Street), and called the station, who said the emergency truck would fix it right away. But on the next two trips downtown, the switch was still frozen and he had to make the same detour.

Meanwhile the passengers waiting on 5th Street didn't see a car for three hours.

Eight Penns in a row on Monday night (the schedule called for Penn and Fremont cars to alternate) is a classic example of how well everything is organized. There should have been a starter (supervisor, also called an inspector) downtown to send a couple of cars Fremont, though no inspector I knew took the trouble to switch cars like that. All lines ran the same; when Como-Harriets got late coming out of St. Paul, there'd be five Oak-Harriets in a row, then the five Comos came through, the last three usually empty, maybe looking at a hundred people waiting for Bryants that didn't come.

March 28, 1951

Lake Street Station has as many as 15 cars running on only 3 motors (the



*cars have 4 motors).*

This particular year with record snow, so much of the trouble was the company's own fault: from switches freezing over because maintenance crews had been fired; from derailments as unpaved streets broke up, also due to firing so many track crews; and above all the parked autos that stalled streetcars everywhere. Company and city didn't cooperate at all to either plow the snow to the curb or ban parking.

Streetcars filled in for buses this spring. North Side was short of buses and often cut the AM Robbinsdale pullouts (*Robbinsdale had been converted to bus in 1948*). Extra streetcars ran the Robbinsdale bus route where there was still track from Broadway and Penn to downtown.

At night half or more of the front window showed mostly just the reflection of the car interior. Some cars had a small sliding curtain which enclosed

Laying over at Munsingwear.



the motorman more on his right side and they were worth about a million bucks, except they couldn't be used when big paying loads were getting on. But they were not in the way on outbound trips when people got off. That much saved many a headache from trying to stare through the glare for a whole night run. So in '50 and '51, under Green, all these curtains were suddenly removed. Several times I asked safety inspector Clyde Jordan why, and he said he'd find out, but never did.

June 6, 1951

We belonged to a group of five cars in the Glenwood and Aldrich wye for the Munsingwear afternoon break.

June 5, 1951

Trolley wheel on my car 1384 showed down sparks on frayed trolley rope, which caught fire and burned right off. On June 21 the trolley rope just plain wore out and broke, sending the pole into the air halfway around the curve at Broadway-Emerson, so I did some climbing to retrieve it.

Certain southbound Chicago cars leaving downtown at 5:30PM got through much faster in the winter than the summer. My 5:32 from 8th-Hennepin during summer always caught a heavy load of store employees who would rush out and get a car when work was done. In winter I often worked the same trip which never got the store employees load, because they had to put on coats and overshoes and so got out for later cars.

July 7, 1951

The Lowry Avenue substation was shut down beginning at 9 PM each night and cars on the north end of the Penn and Fremont lines crept along with their lights only barely glowing. When they got to the circuit breaker at the north end of the 7th Street bridge, WHOOSH the lights came on and the car zoomed away. It took a couple months for them to get the power supply properly distributed to north Minneapolis.

July 20, 1951

Wind storm: Russ Olson got to ride a round trip with me that took six hours instead of the normal two hours. We went to 48th-Chicago, then north and it started to rain and to blow. The rain got harder and harder as we went up Fremont. All of 44th Avenue N. was like a river. I thought I went through about 5 inches of water (*water contacting the motors mounted on the trucks could short them out*), so at the 44th-Oliver wye I called the station and they said wait there until the rain let up. While I was phoning, lightning struck the car and blew out all the lights except the farebox. Several bulbs were shattered into pieces. The Company truck finally arrived after midnight. We went south through lots of standing water, with Fremont wood paving blocks strewn all over the

street.

Worst hit in the storm was car 1605, standing on the loop track at 62nd-Nicollet. There was a 100 mph wind which blew the car over on its pole side.

New pick (*schedule change, when trainmen picked their work by seniority*) at North Side scheduled for August 18 cut off 6 conductor runs and due to that I could not get a run anymore. Foreman was after us quite a bit to get in my bus training for combined bus and car extra board. By Wednesday August 1 the last streetcar run was picked and it was not yet down to me (*on the seniority list*). August 2nd was my turn to pick, and I said I would finish my night run up to August 18 and then quit--no buses.

Then a rather odd thing happened. Foreman called me in and said one North Side man had to transfer to East

The aftermath of the big storm; car 1605 was blown





Side Station within a couple of days, and he wondered if I was interested.

August 7, 1951

My last day at North Side. Car 1566 ran very quietly. I called all the streets that night up and down Penn and Fremont and Chicago Avenue, and every trip was a pleasure. I said to the shopman "This is the best car they ever built." Then I told Mike the night foreman that I would transfer to East Side. I got some old North Side car markups and five window destination sign boards (Foreman Ray Hess said "Take all you want") and I hiked home.

I studented at East Side mostly August 9-10-11, making a couple of trips over each line. PCC instruction on the 11th took 4 hours.

Motorman Kirt Blewett (*Kirt was a trolley fan and longtime Streetcar Museum member*) hooked up a

n over at the 62nd & Nicollet loop.



Milwaukee interurban headlight to his Mahtomedi car and really lit up the countryside.

September 28, 1951

France Avenue from 51st Street to 54th Street was single track, protected by a block signal. Pulling out of the 54th-France wye motorman Bergstrom #397 forgot to watch the signal light, but then noticed a car coming toward him on the single track. So he tried to back up into the wye. Rear trucks were OK on the curve back into 54th Street, but the front truck was over the spring switch and went off the track and his air line broke. I was going to 54th and could see that two cars were on the single track, so wyeed myself at 51st Street. I plugged the spring switch where the tracks went from double to single so the one car could back out and wye. When Bergstrom got his car extricated, he pulled it in to East Side with no brakes, reversing the motors to stop the whole way.



Left: Kirt Blewett

Above: The France Avenue single track south of 51st Street.

Below: At 51st Street the wye diverged at left and the double track narrowed to single. Both Minneapolis Star-Tribune photos, Minnesota Historical Society collection.



*The Mahtomedi line quit on November 1, 1951. Ed, Russ Olson and Bob Schumacher rode the last trip, which may have been run by our car 1239. Ed's note says 1238, but later he says he's not sure. Kirt Blewett quit November 16 and took a job on the South Shore Line interurban out of Michigan City, Indiana.*

Car 1369, at the shops for dismantling, had a car card holder on the front bulkhead stamped for car 931, which was scrapped in 1934 (TCRT stamped the original car number on many components).

December 7, 1951

On the Inter-Campus that day for the first time were button cars 1300-1305. The campus motormen and conductors complained, also the University, that they would not stay warm with doors standing open continuously during layovers and the two campuses. Next day the gate cars were back on campus.

December 17, 1952

Snowstorm. Worst service ever with no excuse. Two inches fell through the day, but the company did no salting of switches whatsoever. In the PM I was going north on the Grand-Monroe 45 minutes late with a jammed car. The switch at 5th-East Hennepin was full of snow and my car went the wrong way. I couldn't possibly get through my load of about 130 to back up from the rear, so I backed up blind from the front, another motorman signalling me from the outside. My car also went the wrong way at 7th & Central, and at Nicollet & Lake. I pulled in at 9:33 instead of 7:44. There were no inspectors on either the Nicollet or Chicago lines. So Ossanna saved some money by firing inspectors and firing the men who threw salt on the switches, and a

lot of people went out and bought automobiles.

December 26, 1951

Power went off throughout the city in the late PM rush hour, and came on in different sections of the system at different times. It came on west of Lake Harriet, west of the circuit breaker near 39th-40th (Cottage City) curve. Car 1613 came zooming along east-bound, crossed the breaker and went black, and whammed into 1319, standing all darkened just around the curve.

December 30, 1951

Grand was the worst line I worked for parked cars when it snowed. PCCs got by better, being an inch or even more narrower than the old cars (depending on how lopsided the old cars were). It was very easy to judge the clearance of a PCC. Often we'd creep up to an auto, then stick our hand out between the rubber door edges to see how close the auto fender was. The practical rule for streetcaring on Grand Avenue in the winter was:

By day: All cars clear, except those with yellow fenders.

By night: All cars clear.

Inter Campus notes: My brother-in-law worked some at the storehouse at the Minneapolis campus (on 15th Avenue SE between University and 4th Street, see photo on page 21). They shipped a number of things to the Farm School by trolley. He has put such things as two bullfrogs in a bushel basket, or boxes of rats or rabbits, or a live 16 pound turkey on the campus car. They would phone someone at the Farm School to take these things off the car. Once they missed on the telephoning and 125 frogs rode the streetcar for over three hours.



The collision at Cottage City, caused by the power outage.



May 17, 1952

*The Fremont line had been abandoned from 36th & Fremont to 44th & Oliver the night before.* Northbound Fremonts had been ordered to carry Chicago-Fremont-36 signs, but it was soon discovered many people let them go by and waited for non-existent Olivers. So around noon someone was sent out to instruct all trainmen to carry Chicago-Fremont-Oliver signs.

January 17, 1953

*Always the traditionalist, Ed disliked running PCC cars and insisted on being assigned a standard car whenever possible.* I was marked up for 9 hours on Bloomington Avenue so the night before I wrote on the car markup board "Button car for #177--Thanks." Night foreman Charlie Cross got mad at my writing on the board and told markup man Earl Rien NOT to give me a button car. Saturday morning I arrived and saw that I had PCC 436. I told clerk Gilling how mad I was and he said I could have all the button cars I wanted.

March 1, 1953

I had PCC troubles. Two of the seat adjustments were broken, and even without that, I thought the seats very uncomfortable. So I called East Side and denounced car 357 and PCCs generally and next trip they brought me car 1307, the only East Side button car to run that Sunday. In the afternoon, the motorman waiting to relieve me said "As soon as I saw this old clunk I thought of you."

March 15, 1953

Worked the Nicollet-Monroe owl. Hourly 20 minute layovers at the north end of Monroe were lonesome. I should have had a hobby like Cain #525 who spent those owl layovers practicing on the clarinet.

March 28, 1953

At 7th-Wabasha a woman with a brace on her leg hopped on my car, handed me a fresh strawberry ice cream cone with a napkin round it, and popped off the car again without a word.

April 18, 1953

*Ed transfers to Lake Street Station.*

June 24, 1953

Car 1316 was covered with advertising posters for the new 3D movie "Arena". For several days it wandered the system as a charter, carrying no passengers. (See photo below)

June 25, 1953

*Ed witnesses the TCRT new bus parade.* Two motor cycle cops with sirens on; 8 TCRT radio cars, 50 new buses. One bus knocked over a safety zone standard. At the station, Charlie in the office said "All those new buses together--you won't see that again."

Said a trainman, "The hell you won't--you'll see them all together on Selby-Lake."

*Ed penned a bit of verse.*

The buses give us much more speed.  
I hate them.

They're just the thing these cities need.  
I hate them.

If one gets stalled the rest go through,  
They're smooth and modern,  
clean and new,,

All shiny yellow, red and blue.  
I hate them.

July 8, 1953

Selby-Lake owl, 2 AM trip. In St. Paul the Pioneer Press truck had a morning paper for me and put four bundles of papers on the car, with stickers showing where they would be thrown out: 2 at 41st-Lake, one at Chicago-Lake, one at Hennepin-Lake.

August 15, 1953

*The PCCs had been sold and removed*

*from service. TCRT found itself short of cars and had to revive quite a few that had been stored for months.* Storage cars at Lake Street Station stood with the doors open. The steps filled with water and everything got all rusty and they forgot to oil our doors. On the line I found I had to push the front doors open and shut by hand.

August 18, 1953

I worked as a flagman, my only time, flagging pullins across the Hiawatha-Lake railroad crossing.

September 16, 1953

Car 1782 had no window sill for the controller window for some weeks. I flung my trip sheet book into that window as I usually did, along with a magazine, and down they went. A shopman came out and spent about 10 minutes fishing my stuff out of the window. Then like a dunce, when I got to 33rd-Johnson and started taking my lunch out of my lunch box, I threw

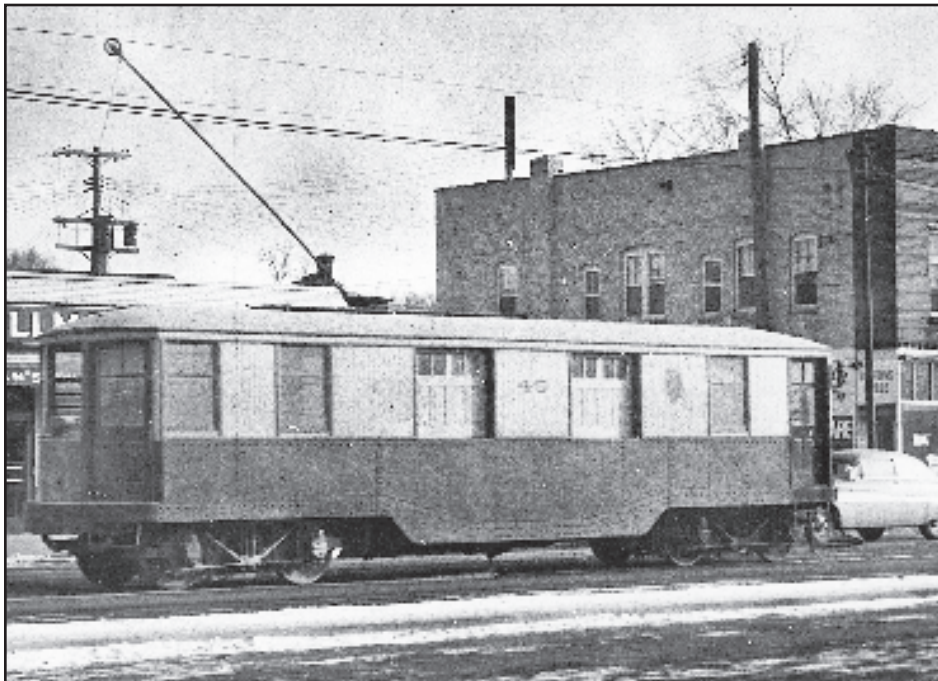


three sandwiches into that window. They burned along with 1782 the following August 10 (peanut butter, I think).

September 29, 1953

I drove a charter for Jobs Daughters, a division of the Shriners. Loaded 58 girls from 8 to 16, two women, a couple of small boys, pop corn and five cases of pop. About seven boys in a convertible followed us. I lost the trolley once, thought the wires were bad. Lost it again and thought my retriever was too touchy, so I cut the trolley rope. Lost the trolley again. Then one girl asked if it was because they were leaning the car over. All the girls in the car were leaning out the gate side windows to holler at the boys in the convertible. So I made them split up half and half on either side of the car and had no more trolley trouble.

Sand car #45.



January 4, 1954

I drove sand car #45 for the first time. The sand cars made from flat work cars like #18 had done good sanding with only two men on them, but #45 should definitely have had three men. The sand man in the center of the car had to shovel sand slowly but regularly into the compartment with the auger, which fed the sand through the hoses. To shut the auger off, he would have to climb through the cars to the controller at the rear. The result was that sand didn't get shut off at intersections, curves, etc., and we left piles of sand near switches or wherever the car waited for traffic signals.

I noticed Noard #90 on the other Como owl car was driving like a sand car, so I started doing the same, and I think we did as much good as a sand car could have. We filled our sand boxes three or four times a night at the

ends of the lines and sanded all the important car stops.

The factory at 33rd-Como let out its night shift at 2:30AM and the Como owl went by there at 2:29, merely to sit at the Hennepin-5th lineup from 2:47 to 3:00AM, so it's not to be wondered that most of those workers drove their automobiles. The Schedule Department would not consider changing the schedule by a minute or two.

March 12, 1954

I got put on the snow plow. Tom Brennan #113 was motorman, Norman Kausal #164 was wing man and I was trolley man (which was the most physical work, hauling in the wing rope when the wing controller brought the wing in to the side. But maybe holding down the dead man (*spring loaded air brake handle that stopped the car when let go*) on the controller was worse.). In plow #79 we went out the Nicollet line to 62nd Street. There, and on the return, we plowed out every wye on the Nicollet line (with coffee, pie and ice cream at the drug store at 54th). Headed north, we backed into each wye, then plugged the spring switch and plowed the curves that the regular cars used for backing, then back into the wye again and out onto the line. We cleaned the wyes and switches at 62nd Street, 58th Street, 48th Street, 38th Street and 2nd Street. Passing the Great Northern depot safety island, we broke the turnbuckle on the wing cable. So we returned to East Side and pulled out again in plow #76. We went up the 2nd Street line to 30th-Grand, plowing the Lowry wye on the way. Also we threw buckets of salt on all the wye switches and the Lowry railroad crossing. On 2nd Street we used a long cable to pull an auto out of a snow bank. The owner gave us three bucks and we used it for breakfast.

### Epilogue

This story has concentrated on Ed's notes about working on the streetcars. He was also constantly riding them and observing,

usually in great detail. As the lines were abandoned and the carhouses closed, he chronicled it. Attached to his notes are a series of letters to fellow motorman and enthusiast Kirt Blewett, who had quit and moved away in 1952. One of them starts with, "Sorry I didn't send you some of this sooner, but I've been moping around with a broken heart all week."

He made a point of riding as many last trips as he could, often in the company of Russ Olson and Bob Schumacher. He photographed up to the very end, documenting what was left, as well as his co-workers. We have 250 of his photos in the MSM collection. He also served as motorman on quite a few of the Minnesota Railfans Association charters that often ran the day after a line closed (see the front cover).

Before the end came, he and Russ did what they could to salvage company records. "From our Buddy Ossanna, Russ got permission to copy old records. We went through all operating bulletins since 1906 at the 11th-Hennepin general offices. We both went through the Snelling erecting shop file room, dust an inch thick, records back to 1910. I think I have enough to make car assignment lists, every place the cars have been since that year. We hope to have Interurbans Press put out 64 or 72 pages on TCRT next spring."

Interurbans 14, the first comprehensive history of TCRT, indeed came out in 1953. It was 88 pages long. We have several copies of it and it's still an excellent reference. Russ Olson collaborated on it and you can see its influence on *Electric Railways of Minnesota*, published in 1976.

The end of the streetcars was more than Ed could bear. He moved to Toronto, hired on with the Toronto Transit Commission which runs streetcars to this day, and stayed there until he retired. We lost track of him for a number of years, but reconnected and he became an MSM member until his death.

So here's to Ed Nelson.



## *Ed Nelson's photos*

Ed documented the last days of Twin Cities streetcars with an insider's perspective. The rest of this issue samples his work.



Ed took these photos from the motorman's seat.

Upper left: 8th & Hennepin from a southbound Chicago car.

Lower left: Bloomington Avenue at 26th Street.

Above: Hennepin Avenue at Lake Street.

Below: The Como Park right of way just west of the Horton Avenue crossing.





Above: Snelling Shops shifter #28 on the transfer table pushing a group of trucks.  
Below: The storage yard at Duluth Station, with wire car #4 at right.

Below: Rebuilt PCCs about to depart for Shaker Heights Rapid Transit.







Above: In 1950 TCRT abandoned portions of the 34th Avenue and 28th Avenue lines and tied the remainder together by straight-railing the 42nd Street track at 28th Avenue, where the two lines met. This is the start of construction.



Above: Mahtomedi cars met at the Henry Street siding in North St. Paul.

Below left: The roof of Fort Snelling double-ended shuttle car #1230. The Mendota Bridge is in the distance.

Below right: The shuttle passed behind the buildings of the Fort Snelling Upper Post.





In the last days before the streetcars quit, Ed took a series of photos of his co-workers.

Above: Joe Stepkala #127 and John Zimmerman #11 at the 44th and France loop.

Below: John Bruzak #381 and Joe Frank #193 at East Side Station.



Above: Charlie Fisher and Harry Peterson #1933 at East Side Station.

Below: Ora Taylor and Sam Westphal at Snelling Station. They have just driven the University of Minnesota switch car from the St. Paul campus to Snelling for scrapping.







Inter-Campus Line scenes:

Above left: Periodically the U of M switch car descended the hill from the St. Paul campus to retrieve a freight car from the Minnesota Transfer Railway interchange. This is a hopper of coal for the power plant.

Above right: A St. Paul-bound car on 15th Avenue SE passes the U of M storehouse and approaches 4th Street, where it will cross the Oak Street line and join the Como-Harriet for a couple of miles.

Right: Gate cars 1266 and 1268 in the snow at the "Farm School" loop. Ed is piloting car 1269. The Inter-Campus ran periodic double headers to accommodate the class breaks. That, plus lateness due to snow, probably explains why three are here at once.





Ed thoroughly documented the Como-Harriet line in its last days.  
 Above: Como Avenue at 30th Avenue SE, passing one of the temporary post-war student housing villages.  
 Below: The Old St. Anthony commercial district at East Hennepin and 4th Street.



Above: Boarding in Dinkytown on 4th Street at 14th Avenue SE.  
 Below: Cars meet at the traffic islands in front of the Great Northern depot on Hennepin Avenue. Note the Grain Belt Beer sign.







Above: Crossing 33rd Street on the alley right of way between Irving and James Avenues near Lake Calhoun.  
Below: A southbound car passes the Lakewood Cemetery stop, where our streetcars end today.



Above: A northbound car crosses the bridge over 36th Street. Passengers climbed the stairs to board here.  
Below: This is the junction where the Oak-Harriet cars turned south onto Xerxes Avenue, while Como-Harriet cars continued straight.





This is two days before the end of streetcar service in 1954 and the buses are encroaching on all sides. Ed traveled up and down the Como-Harriet and Oak-Harriet lines, capturing farewell images. This is Hennepin Avenue next to Loring Park, with the Plaza Hotel at left and the Basilica in the distance.





# MINNESOTA STREETCAR MUSEUM

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